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Symbols of Diversity in Political Contestation During the 2019 Presidential Election and 2020 Simultaneous Regional Elections
(Perspective of Santri at the North Coast of Central Java)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study describes the perspective of Santri from the North Coast of Central Java on the capitalization of religious symbols in political contestation during the 2019 presidential election and the 2020 simultaneous regional elections. Political elites strategically used religious symbols to secure victory for their presidential and regional leader candidates. Capitalizing religious symbols is believed to signify the rise of identity politics and the decline of nationalism in Indonesian society. The people of the North Coast of Central Java, specifically the Santri, have been directly affected by the intensification of this matter during the period of political contestation in the 2019 presidential election and the simultaneous regional elections in 2020 throughout the archipelago. The Santri from the North Coast of Central Java, known as traditionalist Santri, has a paternalistic attitude towards Kyai and has a significant position and influence in the politics of Indonesia. This is particularly relevant in light of the prevalent usage of religious symbols to gain support from voters. By using grounded research with a phenomenological approach, this study discovered that Santri would only engage in a certain action if they had obtained the approval or endorsement of the Kyai. As a result, a particular group of society cannot claim exclusive ownership over the growing popularity of religious symbols. It occurs since the distinction between conservative-ideological and moderate-cultural groups has eroded, resulting in the widespread interpretation of religious symbols in the context of politics. **Keywords:** Symbols of Kyai figures, paternalism of Santri, widespread interpretation of religious symbols and practices, Presidential election, Political.

INTRODUCTION

The direct Presidential and Regional Leaders Elections exemplify Indonesia's commitment to the principles of democracy. This approach was selected to ensure that the public has direct involvement in selecting the ideal candidate for leadership, as determined by the majority. However, this idealistic goal often clashes with the interests of people and community organizations that exert influence and control and even make promises in exchange for voting for certain politicians, including the growing popularity of money politics(Suseno, n.d.). These factors act as challenges that impede the proper implementation of democracy, and the public appears incapable of avoiding these multiple challenges. In fact, the public engages in all transactions and defames each other by exploiting religious symbols to guarantee success in Presidential Elections (Pilpres, Pemilihan Presiden) and Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada, Pemilihan Kepala Daerah)(Muhaimin, 2023).

Prior to the Pilpres 2019, which included two pairs of candidates, the participants strategically used religious symbols. It includes the incorporation of religious persons or religious leaders, the presentation of religious symbols such as Islamic skullcaps, sarongs, white robes, turbans, and prayer beads, and the arrangement

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of religious ceremonies such as tabligh akbar, dhikr, fellowship, religious gatherings, and other similar events(Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021), to win a presidential candidate who is recognized for their committed support for religious issues(Saputro, 2018).

Socio-religious groups that capitalize on religious symbols and claim that presidential candidates and regional heads from their groups will fight for Islam(Pilpres 2019: Joko Widodo-KH. Ma'ruf Amin Nomor 01, Prabowo Subianto-Sandiaga Uno Nomor 02 Read More: Https://Setkab.Go.Id/Pilpres-2019-Joko-Widodo-Kh-Maruf-Amin-Nomor-01-Prabowo-Subianto-Sandiaga-Uno-Nomor-02/, n.d.). Based on the narrative constructed on social media, it seems that this group defines Islam as a kind of religion that is exclusive and focuses on formal religious symbols(Merino, 2010) or as Islamic religious organizations that prioritize formality. This group is a constituent of a political alliance consisting of parties that assert themselves as religious nationalists in opposition to nationalist secular. Nevertheless, previous research has determined that the act of capitalizing religious symbols as a kind of commodification is indeed undertaken by both advocates of presidential candidate pairs and regional leaders to construct a religious image to secure the public's support(Hasanah, 2020).

Religion and religious symbols have significant importance and are often seen as the basis for similarities and differences in identity. These aspects are often used to rally a group and engage in political contestation (Hamdi, Rahmawadi, Nasrullan, Riduan, & Prasojo, 2023). In the constellation of the Pilpres 2019 and Pilkada 2020, in fact, no party has the right to claim to be a group fighting for religion. Also, it is found that there is a dialectic and expansion of the meaning of religious symbols narrated by secular nationalist groups (Nurrochman, 2019). The classification of religious nationalists and secular nationalists in the political context of Indonesia has become obsolete and insufficient for classifying these two groupings. The researchers established a novel classification, specifically labeling religious nationalist movements as conservative-ideological and secular nationalist parties as cultural moderate (Sunaryanto & Rizal, 2024). This new category signifies an alleviation of tension in the use of religious symbols among religious nationalists and an amplification of the significance of religious symbols for secular nationalist groups. The Santri (Islamic boarding school students or alums) from the North Coast (Pantura, Pantai Utara) of Central Java are actively engaged in the political arena. Their stance and comprehension on the capitalization of religious symbols in the Pilpres 2019 have emerged as a fresh topic of discussion in the national political discourse. The Islamic boarding schools in the North Coast of Central Java are characterized by their adherence to Salafism and their focus on cultivating religious culture, rather than only emphasizing the formalization of Islamic principles. According to Gus Dur, Former President of Indonesia from 1999 until 2001, the process of formalizing Islamic religious teachings would result in the loss of religious essence and consciousness(KH. Abdurrahman Wahid (ed), 2009).

Following the Pilpres 2019 in several places, the capitalization of religious symbols has polarized society, particularly in Jakarta, where tensions have escalated since the 2017 gubernatorial election (Pilgub, Pemilihan Gubernur)(Hamdi, 2021). In the North Coast of Central Java, polarization has been reduced due to the practice of unwinding and expanding the significance of religious symbols at democratic party events. The Islamic boarding school (Pesantren) on the North Coast of Central Java exhibits paternalistic characteristics and typology. Santri, following the instructions of their Kyai, demonstrates tawadhu (modesty and humility) to their teachers and Kyai, who care about mitigating the polarization of society.

Gus Baha', a prominent young kiai who is popular among the people, supports the belief that it is acceptable to use religious symbols and/or money politics in selecting future leaders who can achieve the common good (mashlahah 'ammah). This ability is conditional upon the presence of candidates with a track record of untrustworthiness who lack the capacity to achieve the mashlahah 'ammah (public good). By excluding (sad al-dzari'ah) those who lack credibility, using religious symbols and/or engaging in financial manipulation, the electoral process allows for the emergence of candidates with a proven ability to fulfill the community's objectives. This comment, disseminated via YouTube, suggests that the public believes it is appropriate to use religious symbols and engage in money politics in order to get a competent leader. Voters Legality of Presidential and Simultaneous Regional Elections The Pilpres 2019 would continue with the Pilkada 2020 to elect governors, regents and/or mayors, which will be held separately from presidential elections and legislative elections. Through regional elections, it is hoped that regional leaders who can realize public expectations through pro-people policies will be identified (Akbar, 2017). Democracy in the context of presidential elections and regional leaders elections is an opportunity for the people to select and determine which candidates will be accepted or rejected to lead them.

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The implementation of direct Pilkada began in 2005 and entailed an initial term of five years, subject to a maximum restriction of two terms. The Republic of Indonesia has enacted Law Number 10 of 2016, which amends Law Number 1 of 2015. This amendment specifically relates to the government regulations that replace Law Number 1 of 2014, which pertains to the election of governors, regents, and mayors. The Law aims to regulate the synchronization of national and regional elections, ensuring that the implementation period aligns with the conclusion of the term of the adjacent regional leader. The Pilkada will be conducted simultaneously throughout many provinces, regions, and cities, starting from 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2020, and the highest number of Pilkada in Indonesia will occur in November 2024. Prior to the 2024 simultaneous national Pilkada, there will be preceding simultaneous Pilkada that will correspond with the tenure of regional leaders. Several simultaneous Pilkada are being held in accordance with the procedures outlined in Article 201. Simultaneous Pilkada was held in December 2015. The regional elections were held in regions whose regional leaders had positions ending in 2015 until June 2016.

The Pilkada took place simultaneously in February 2017. These elections were conducted in areas where the terms of the regional leaders ended between June and December of 2016 and 2017. The regional leaders elected in 2017 will hold their positions until 2022. The Pilkada for officials whose terms expire in 2018 and 2019 will occur simultaneously in June 2018. The regional leaders elected in the Pilkada 2018 will hold their positions until 2023. In September 2020, a simultaneous election was conducted for the regional leaders who were elected in 2015. The regional leaders elected in the 2020 election will hold their positions until 2024.

A significant correlation exists between the level of voter understanding, the extent of voter involvement, and the associated political expenses. The excessive expenses associated with conducting regional head elections, which are spent by both groups and candidates and by voters who must travel to the voting locations, significantly affect voter participation. Consequently, if the elections are conducted simultaneously, the participation rate is expected to be much greater than holding the polls separately for the presidential election and the election for legislative members. Electoral unification aims to enhance voter awareness and understanding of the execution of elections. Efforts are being made to establish collaboration after elections among national, province, and district/city administrations, with the aim of enhancing the efficiency of the presidential government system at both the national and regional levels.(Jurdi, 2020)

Of the several Pilkada held simultaneously since 2015, 2017, 2018, and 2020, the largest number of regions that held simultaneous Pilkada was the Pilkada 2020. A total of 270 regions conducted elections during this period. The election process includes the selection of regents and deputy regents in 224 districts, governors and deputy governors in 9 provinces, and mayors and deputy mayors in 37 cities.

In 2020, several nations, including Indonesia, were impacted by the global spread of the Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, resulting in a significant rise in cases and a high number of deaths. On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) officially declared the worldwide spread of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as a pandemic. The President enacted Presidential Decree Number 12 of 2022, declaring COVID-19 a catastrophic national disaster. In order to prevent, manage, and overcome the spread of COVID-19 2019, global leaders are initiating efforts to mobilize their nations and adjust to the new normal of everyday life.

Governments from central to regional levels need to take action to overcome the spread of COVID-19 and reorganize the agenda for the Pilkada 2020 which will be held simultaneously. The Pilkada 2020 was indeed faced with efforts to maintain democracy amidst the threat of spreading the virus. According to the Regulation of the General Election Commission (KPU, Komisi Pemilihan Umum) Number 15 of 2019, which outlines the various phases, plans, and timelines for conducting regional head elections, the Pilkada 2020 was scheduled to take place on September 23, 2020. Due to the significant impact of the COVID-19 outbreak in Indonesia, the scheduling of regional elections has been revised in accordance with legislation. The enactment of Law Number 6 of 2020, which pertains to the substitution of Government Regulations for Law Number 2 of 2020, specifically addresses the third amendment to Law Number 1 of 2015 regarding the substitution of Government Regulations for Law Number 1 of 2014 concerning regional head elections, has been postponed until December 2020.

From a social construction perspective, the institutionalization of regulations for the implementation of the Pilpres 2019 and Pilkada 2020 has gained juridical legitimacy, but its implementation has encountered resistance from sociological and religious norms in the internalization process. The implementation of the Pilpres 2019 and Pilkada 2020 were marked by many deviations from social and religious norms, namely regarding the use

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of religious symbols and money politics, which have been considered taboo and cannot be legally accepted by society.

Implementation of the Pilpres 2019 and Pilkada 2020 in Central Java

Implementation of the 2019 General Election in Central Java

Article 222 of Law Number 7 of 2017 on General Elections establishes the presidential threshold, which mandates that presidential candidates must be nominated by political parties that have either a minimum of 20% of the seats in the House of Representatives (DPR, Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat) or at least 25% of the national valid votes cast in the previous DPR election. Examining the outcomes of the 2014 election, which serves as the basis for selecting presidential candidates in 2019, it is evident that no one party can propose a candidate independently without forming a coalition with other political parties. The nomination standards need a minimum of 112 seats or 25% of the vote. The successful political party in the 2014 election, namely PDI-P, secured a mere 109 seats and accounted for 18.95% of the total vote. Golkar had 91 seats in the DPR, Gerindra held 73 seats, Demokrat held 61 seats, Nasdem held 35 seats, Hanura held 16 seats, PAN held 49 seats, PKB held 47 seats, PKS held 40 seats, and PPP held 39 seats. The 2019 presidential election presents two candidates for president and vice president. The coalition of PDI-P, Golkar Party, PKB, Nasdem Party, PPP and Hanura Party supported the Joko Widodo-Ma'ruf Amin team. Apart from that, there was support from other political parties outside parliament, namely PSI, PBB, Perindo, and PKPI. Meanwhile, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno were supported by a coalition of the Gerindra, Demokrat, PKS, and PAN parties. Coalitions established among political parties are primarily focused on gaining power (office-oriented approach) and achieving electoral success (vote-oriented approach) rather than placing policy priorities (policy-oriented approach) at the forefront. This is obvious in the process of creating a coalition that prioritizes strength rather than ideological factors. For instance, PKB and PPP, political parties with religious affiliations, decided to nominate Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin as their candidates. In contrast, PAN and PKS took a different decision by nominating Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno as their team (Addiansyah, 2019.)

Therefore, the process of forming a coalition to meet the criteria for selecting presidential and vice-presidential candidates is not divided based on party ideology. The established alliance assesses the possibility of success based only on strength without considering commonalities in philosophy and future policy ideas. The calculation involves assessing the power resources held by possible coalition partners and determining the amount of power they would acquire if they were to win the election. Party philosophy is somewhat disregarded in comparison to the popularity of political party personalities or candidates in the presidential nomination campaign.(Addiansyah, 2019)

According to the recapitulation and determination of the election results in Central Java Province, Joko Widodo and Ma'ruf Amin obtained a total of 16,825,511 votes, which accounts for 77.29 percent of the votes. Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno obtained a total of 4,944,447 votes, which accounts for 22.71 percent of the votes. This indicates a disparity in votes between the two candidates, with a margin of 11,881,064. Specifically, the Jokowi-Ma'ruf duo received over four times the number of votes compared to the Prabowo-Sandi combination. The total number of voters in Central Java amounted to 28,307,438 individuals. Out of this total, a staggering 22,376,472 people actively participated in the voting process, casting a total of 21,769,958 legitimate ballots and 606,514 votes that were deemed invalid. One of the candidate pairs disputed the outcome of the Pilpres 2019. Candidate Pair Number 2, Prabowo Subianto and Sandiaga Uno, have lodged a legal complaint with the Constitutional Court (MK, Mahkamah Konstitusi) challenging the vote count results of the Presidential Election, which declared Candidate Pair Number 1, Joko Widodo and K.H. Ma'ruf Amin, as the winners, according to results announced by the KPU.

The presidential election attracts more public attention compared to the legislative election. Throughout the presidential election campaign, there was a significant level of intensity and escalation, as it was expected for supporters of each contender to undermine their opponents. The dissemination of narratives, including the subtleties of nationality and the use of religious identity as a means of opposing the established order during the 2019 general election, is seen as promoting the growing popularity of identity politics (Ardipandanto, 2020). On the other hand, the opposing candidate (incumbent) likewise employs a narrative centered on religious identity, claiming that the government has actively defended and enforced religious teachings, constructed houses

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of worship, facilitated religious education, enacted laws governing zakat, and regulated Islamic boarding schools, among many others.

Ulama or Kyai are being used as a means of drawing attention in the exploitation of religion during the Pilpres 2019. This is inherently linked to the fact that the majority of the Indonesian population adheres to Islam. In Indonesia, the term "Ulama" or " Kyai" refers to those who are not only recognized as experts in Islamic religious matters, but also have social-anthropological significance. The presence of Kyai is a distinctive aspect of Pesantren society, which arises from the paternalistic nature of Indonesian culture. However, it is important to note that the title of Kyai is bestowed on individuals via a theological procedure. The figures and mass base of Ulama or Kyai are potential votes that can be contested(Huda & Dayat, 2019).

In relation to the Pilpres 2019 contestation in a province in Central Java, each Pesantren caretaker has Kyai as a central figure who serves as a representative of their own institution and may have distinct political perspectives compared to other Pesantren. A Pesantren may significantly impact the lives of the local or surrounding community due to its cultural significance. Unsurprisingly, several individuals adhere to the teaching principles that are still deeply rooted in Pesantren, which emphasize strict obedience to the instructions and teachings of the Kyai they follow, particularly known as the term "ndherek Kyai". From a psychological perspective, respondents choose Kyai, Ulama, or Pesantren as the primary factor in their political decision-making for the Pilpres 2019, rather than considering the supporting political parties (Arravi, Kushandajani, & Martini, 2021).

The regional Pilkada took place on December 9, 2020, and was significantly impacted by the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic, a non-natural catastrophe. Consequently, the circumstances surrounding these elections changed significantly from previous ones. In addition to requiring meticulous preparation, organizers and voters have to stick to health procedures, including body temperature screening, mask-wearing, social distancing, and glove utilization. Voters with a body temperature higher than the typical average range of 36.5 to 37°C will be sent to a designated isolation booth for voting.

Central Java Province is one of the provinces in Indonesia which has held simultaneous Pilkada in 2020. Simultaneous Pilkada in 2020 have been held in 21 regencies/cities, namely Semarang City, Semarang Regency, Surakarta, Magelang, Pekalongan Regency, Pekalongan City, Kendal, Demak, Grobogan, Blora, Rembang, Klaten, Boyolali, Wonogiri, Sukoharjo, Sragen, Purworejo, Wonosobo; Purbalingga, Pemalang, and Kebumen. During the 2020 simultaneous Pilkada, there was a situation where there was only one candidate for regional head candidates. If this happens, the single candidate will face an empty box. There are five regencies and one city in the regional elections in Central Java Province, which only contain one candidate, namely Grobogan Regency, Kebumen, Boyolali, Sragen, Wonosobo, and Semarang City by displaying a single candidate pair or against an empty box.

One of the parameters for the success or failure of holding Pilpres and Pilkada is the presence of public participation using the right to vote. The high level of public legitimacy depends on the high level of participation in the political process of voting in elections and regional elections (Endriasari & Santoso, 2022). The implementation of social restrictions, such as social distancing, by the government in response to the COVID-19 pandemic did not seem to discourage public engagement in the Pilkada 2020. The KPU has reported a significant level of public participation in the Pilkada 2020. Specifically, the participation rates in Boyolali, Rembang Regency, Klaten, Sukoharjo Regency, and Semarang Regency were 89.53 percent, 85 percent, 81.4 percent, 80.70 percent, and 78.78 percent, respectively. However, the participation percentage in Grobogan is rather low, namely approximately 63 percent(Jatengdaily.com, 2020).

There seems to be a correlation between people's obedience to the fatwa of kiai or religious figures who do not believe in the existence of COVID-19 and they openly invite their congregation to live normally, and there is no need to live by maintaining social distance, no need to wear masks and no need for vaccines. During a discussion with KH. Ahmad Badawi Jekulo Kudus (KH. Ahmad Badawi is a young Kyai – son of KH. Ahmad Basyir – founder of the Pesantren Darul Falah Islamic Boarding School in Jekulo Kudus District and was once a member of the Kudus Regency DPRD and the PKB faction. Interview on October 20, 2022), he said that there is no need to fear the Covid-19, as one should have faith in Allah's will. Political participation, both as voters and as contestants, is influenced by the role of religious elites such as Kyai and Ulama. They are figures who are positioned as consultants in the spiritual field and other areas of life. Likewise, the government often utilizes the services of Kyai and Ulama to bridge the implementation of government programs in society. By involving Kyai in political contestation, both

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as regional head candidates and supporters, the Kyai's followers will follow their views and choices(Wafa, 2012). By 2021, the North Coast part of Central Java will have a total of 1,753 Pesantren, accommodating 259,853 students. These schools are distributed throughout 16 districts/cities.

Number of Pesantren, Kiai Ustadz and Santri According to Regency/City in Pantura, Central Java, 2020 - 2021

Number of Islamic Courses, Leaders, Teachers and Santri by Regency/City in Jawa Tengah,
2020 - 2021

Regency/Municipality		Pesantren		Kyai/Ustadz Islamic Leader		Santri	
		2020	2021	2020	2021	2020	2021
Kabupaten/*Regency*							
1	Blora	52	52	852	52	8 317	8 317
2	Rembang	113	113	955	472	18 777	18 808
3.	Pati	216	216	234	770	33 156	18 278
4	Kudus	113	113	495	108	18 957	23 548
5.	Jepara	182	182	985	137	25 987	15 068
6.	Demak	122	122	805	133	20 997	20 995
7.	Semarang	138	137	730	133	22 227	22 227
8	Kendal	114	114	282	110	21 778	21 778
9	Batang	32	32	354	29	5 951	8 888
10	Pekalongan	89	89	983	85	10 870	9 034
11.	Pemalang	164	164	970	163	20 295	20 948
12.	Tegal	62	62	548	81	21 516	19 680
13.	Brebes	150	150	550	149	30 723	30 772
	Kota/*Municipality*						
1	Semarang	162	162	742	155	14 602	16 529
2.	Pekalongan	33	33	458	39	4 853	4 187
3.	Tegal	11	11	138	9	1 334	1 456
Jawa Tengah		1.753	1.753	559.531	2.625	831.972.023	259.853

METHOD

Area, Design and Data

The research area was The Pilkada 2020 was conducted in 16 districts/cities in the Pantura area, namely Rembang Regency, Blora Regency, Pati Regency, Kudus Regency, Demak Regency, Semarang Regency, and Pekalongan Regency. According to data from the Pilkada 2020, Rembang Regency had 113 Pesantren with a participation rate of 85%. Blora Regency had 52 Pesantren with a participation rate of 77.63%. Pati Regency had 216 Pesantren with a participation rate of 74.51%. Kudus Regency had 113 Pesantren with a participation rate of 84.25%. Demak Regency had 122 Pesantren with a participation rate of 73%. Semarang Regency had 137 Pesantren with a participation rate of 78.7%. Pekalongan Regency had 89 Pesantren with a participation rate of 78%.(*Banyaknya Pondok Pesantren, Kyai Ustadz Dan Santri Menurut Kabupaten/Kota Di Jawa Tengah, 2020 - 2021*, n.d.)

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The Pesantren community, as a representation of the views of Pesantren, has its own political views, but in the constellation of presidential and regional leader elections, its aspirations must be to join political parties that nominate presidential and regional leader candidates. The community of Santri from the North Coast of Central Java, as a representative of a conservative-ideological group, is similar to the party of PDI-P, which has a nationalist ideology.(Geraldy, 2019) and dominates in Central Java Province. Of the 21 simultaneous Pilkada in Central Java Province in 2020, PDI-P succeeded in winning 17 of the 21 candidates nominated in the simultaneous regional elections. PDI-P's defeat only occurred in four areas: Purworejo, Magelang City, Kendal, and Pemalang. This means that as many as 85 percent of the simultaneous regional elections in Central Java were won by candidate pairs supported by the PDI-P(Stefy Thenu, 2020).

RESULT

Complete data regarding Pilkada in the North Coast region of Central Java is as follows:

Rembang Regency
Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

There are two pairs of candidates competing in the election. Pair number 1 consists of Harno as the candidate for regional head and Bayu as the candidate for deputy regional head. The coalition of Demokrat, Nasdem, Hanura, PKS, and Gerindra supports them. Pair number 2 consists of Abdul Hafidz as the candidate for regional head and Mochamad Hanies Cholil Barro' as the candidate for deputy regional head. The coalition of PDI-P, PPP, PKB, and Golkar supports them. The KPU of Rembang Regency, in accordance with Decree Number 6/PL.02.7-Kpt/3317/KPU-Kab//II/2021, has officially declared H. Abdul Hafidz and H. Mochamad Hanies Cholil Barro' as the elected regent and deputy regent for the 2020 Rembang Regency regional elections. They received a total of 214,237 votes, which accounts for 50.65% of the total votes cast.

Level of Participation

The Final Voter List (DPT, *Daftar Pemilih Tetap*) consisted of 490,687 registered voters. The participation percentage, which has reached 85 percent, indicates that it surpasses the central KPU voter objective of around 77.5 percent. The significant voter turnout is closely linked to the proactive efforts of the regional election organizers who actively engaged with rural communities to raise awareness about the regional elections. The restrictions on open campaigning are primarily aimed at preventing large gatherings and minimizing the transmission of Covid-19. Consequently, organizers and regional head candidates are compelled to use social media platforms extensively to encourage citizens to participate in the electoral process and choose their leaders.

Blora Regency
Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

According to the recapitulation data, the candidate pair Arief Rohman and Tri Yuli Setyowati, who are running for the position of Blora Regent, got a total of 318,380 votes, which accounts for 59.71 percent of the total votes. Umi Kulsum and Agus Sugiyanto, the candidate duo, earned a total of 199,646 votes. Meanwhile, the candidate pair consisting of Dwi Astutiningsih and Riza Yudha Prasetia obtained a total of 15,187 votes.

Level of Participation

Based on the recapitulation statistics, it can be inferred that voter turnout amounted to 77.63 percent of the DPT, which consisted of 700,995 people. This value aligns with the specific objective set by the local KPU. The KPU of Blora's official computation determined that there was a total of 533,213 valid votes. There were 10,970 invalid votes out of a total of 544,183 votes cast.

Pati Regency
Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

The KPU of Pati has officially designated H Haryanto SH MM MSi and H Saiful Arifin as the sole candidate pair for the Regent and Deputy Regent of Pati Regency positions. They have been elected to serve as Regent and Deputy Regent of Pati Regency from 2017 to 2022. The pair emerged victorious by garnering 519,675 votes, equivalent to 74.51 percent, surpassing the empty box, which received just 177,762 votes, accounting for 25.49 percent of the total 697,437 valid votes cast over 21 sub-districts.

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Level of Participation

No data on participation levels was discovered, and it should be noted that the regional elections took place in 2017, not 2020.

Kudus Regency

Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

Muhammad Tamzil and Abdul Hamid were selected by the KPU of Kudus Regency as the Regent of Kudus. They secured victory with 213,990 votes out of a total of 503,419 valid votes. Candidate pair number one, consisting of Masan and Noor Yasin, earned a total of 194,093 votes. On the other hand, candidate pair number two was composed of H. Nor Hartoyo and Junaidi received a total of 7,393 votes. Candidate pair number three, Sri Hartini and Setia Budi Wibowo, received a total of 76,793 votes, while candidate pair number four, Akhwan and Hadi Sucipto, received 11,151 votes.

Level of Participation

The level of participation from the Kudus community in the Pilkada 2019 was very high. The election for the position of Kudus Regent achieved a turnout of 84.25 percent. Meanwhile, the voter turnout for the governor election in Kudus, Central Java, reached an impressive 84.26 percent. This accomplishment was made possible due to the collaboration of the organizers and each set of candidates, as well as the Police, Indonesian Army (TNI), and Civil Service Police Department (Satpol PP), who closely monitored the distribution process from beginning to end. The service of the Directorate General of Population and Civil Registration (Dukcapil), the Ministry of Home Affairs in Kudus, and the mass media are engaged in reporting on the Pilkada process, along with other participating agencies.("Rapat Pleno Kpu Kudus Tetapkan Paslon Nomor Lima Sebagai Pemenang Pilbup Kudus," n.d.)

Demak Regency

Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

In the regional elections in Demak Regency, two coalitions have nominated regional head candidates. One coalition consists of the PDI-P, Demokrat, Golkar, PAN, PKB, and PPP, who support Eisti'anah and Ali Makhsun as their candidates. The Gerindra Party and the Nasdem Party have created a new partnership to promote the pairing of Mugiyono with Muhammad Badruddin. Pair number 1 received 346,878 votes, which accounts for 56.82 percent of the total. On the other hand, pair number 2, consisting of Mugiyono and Muhammad Badruddin, secured 263,624 votes, or 43.18 percent of the total.

Level of Participation

The Demak Regency Pilkada, held on December 9, 2020, had a DPT of 855,713. The voter turnout was 625,792, which accounted for 73 percent of the eligible voters.

Semarang Regency

Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

In the Pilkada 2020 Semarang, two candidate pairs are backed by party alliances. Six political party coalitions, namely PPP, PKS, Golkar, Gerindra, PAN, and Nasdem, are endorsing the candidate pair Bintang Narsasi and H. Gunawan Wibisono, who are running for the positions of regent and deputy regent with serial number 1. Simultaneously, the political party's alliance consisting of PDI-P, PKB, Hanura, and Democrat have endorsed Ngesti Nugraha as the Deputy Regent, who is the incumbent, and Basari as the Regional Legislative Council (DPRD, *Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat Daerah*) member with serial number 2. Bintang Narsasi-Gunawan Wibisono (Bison) received a total of 189,264 votes, while Ngesti Nugraha-Basari (Ngebas) secured a lead with 386,222 votes.

Level of Participation

The voter turnout for the Pilkada 2020 in Semarang Regency was 78.7 percent. Semarang Regency is in the top 5 regions in terms of voter turnout in the 21 regional elections in Central Java.

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Pekalongan Regency
Regional Leaders Elections (Pilkada)

The duo consisting of Asip Kholbihi and Sumarwati, who ran as candidates in the Pilkada 2020 in Pekalongan Regency, were defeated by the opposing pair, Fadia A Rafiq and Riswadi, who were running as deputy regent candidates. A total of 237,440 votes were cast for the candidates running for the positions of elected regent and deputy regent. On the other hand, his adversary secured a total of 312,556 votes. According to the KPU (The Verdict of the Pekalongan Regency General Election CommissionThe verdict of the Pekalongan Regency General Election Commission Number : 208 / PL.02.6-Kpt / 3326 / KPU -Kab/XII/2020), there were a total of 549,996 legitimate votes.

Level of Participation

The voter turnout in the Pilkada 2020 in Pekalongan Regency was 78%. The significant level of engagement can be attributed to the political parties' endeavors to effectively engage the Pesantren community of the North Coast of Central Java, particularly in the 2020 Central Java regional head governor election and the 2019 presidential election.

DISCUSSION

Capitalization of Religious Symbols in the Pilpres 2029 and Pilkada 2020 of Central Java

The connotative adoption of religious symbols carries a more biased connotation in contrast to the politicization of religion. Specifically, it refers to the act of employing religious symbols and practices in a way that creates the perception and belief that the pursued agenda is aligned with and advocating for religious truth. Meanwhile, a wide range of strategies are used, including propaganda, indoctrination, campaigns, mobilization of the people, provocation of religious emotions, and dissemination of doctrines from religion, all aiming to achieve political goals, advance a political agenda, or influence public policy(Ronaldo & Darmaiza, 2021).

The process of elevating the status and importance of religion and religious practices began to take place sometime after the death of the Prophet Muhammad. The biggest concern among the companions is the question of who has the authority to succeed Prophet Muhammad as the leader of the Muslim community. Undoubtedly, it is an exceptional issue to refrain from discussing the interment of the Prophet and other topics pertaining to his funeral. The situation remains intriguing to observe and signifies that the matter of power is consistently captivating for Muslims. The situation seemingly prompted a conflict between the Ansar and the Muhajirin, but they eventually resolved their differences via discussion (musyawarah) at Saqifah Bani Sa'idah.(Sodiqin, n.d.)

The separation of the Muslim community occurred after the end of Caliph 'Uthman ibn 'Affan's rule when he was succeeded by Caliph 'Ali ibn Abi Talib. During the last three years of Uthman's authority, the longstanding conflict between the Bani Hashim, led by 'Ali bin Abi Talib, and the Bani Umayyad, led by Mu'awiyah bin Abi Sufyan, started to escalate. Essentially, the conflict between the two groups revolved on the issue of authority. This is evident in the *Jamal* war, which occurred between the 'Ali ibn Abi Talib faction and the 'Aisyah faction, with the latter receiving aid from Talhah and Zubair, who sought help from the Umayyad dynasty. The core of the conflict between the two groups is essentially a power struggle. Evidence of this may be traced back to the Jamal War, which pitted 'Ali bin Abi Talib against 'Aisyah, with the support of Talha and Zubair. In seeking vengeance for the killing of Usman bin Affan, they sought the help of the Umayyad dynasty.

The conflict between Ali bin Abi Talib and Muawiyah began from an argument about seeking revenge for the murder of 'Uthman ibn 'Affan. Ali bin Abi Talib's delay in carrying out this demand led to the commencement of the *Shiffin* war between him and Muawiyah. Conflicts among tribes (su'ub) in Arab territories were only resolved by Rasulullah PBUH until the conclusion of the caliphate of 'Uthman bin 'Affan. However, it seems that these conflicts have arisen once again. The Prophet Muhammad PBUH, revered as a religious symbol and led by The Almighty Allah's revelation, is also a wise and highly regarded human figure among group leaders who often have disagreements in the Arabian Peninsula.

The resolution (tahkim) put the conflict to a conclusion. Shiffin was an endeavor to establish peace by designating Abu Musa al-Asy'ari as a mediator who served as a religious symbol. A charismatic religious figure symbolized the 'Ali bin Abi Talib faction, whereas the Mu'awiyah side was represented by Amr bin Ash, a companion of the prophet who was previously assigned by the Prophet to govern the Yemeni territory. No matter

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the goals and motivations behind the appointment of representatives for negotiation, it can be seen from a socio-religious perspective that the two individuals are symbolic of influential religious authorities who have influence over both sides.

The use of religious and religious symbols (Islam) in the history of Islamic civilization occurred again in Indonesia. This phenomenon was apparent during the 2017 DKI Jakarta gubernatorial election and continued in the 2019 presidential election. Basuki Cahaya Purnama (Ahok) as a candidate for DKI Jakarta's governor, who is a Protestant Christian, intentionally used texts from the Al-Qur'an, stating that "devout Muslims would certainly reject me as governor." This implication evidently intends to manipulate the interpretation of *ushul fiqh*, aiming to divert Muslims' attention from Surah al-Maidah (5): 51, thus allowing the individual to be chosen as governor. This expectation was actually the opposite, earning the anger of Muslims, especially the red and white coalition, not only rejecting Ahok as governor but actually accusing him of insulting the Islamic religion.

As explained by the resource person Prof. Dr. Ade Dedi Indranaya - Professor of UIN Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, on December 19, 2022, that, in this context, religious sentiment becomes very strong, the motto of Bhinneka Tunggal Ika is neglected, especially for the people of Jakarta, and the emotions spread to all Indonesian people, even if they are not involved in the election of DKI Jakarta governor. The situations in Central Java show slight differences from other locations in Java, particularly DKI Jakarta. In the 2018 Central Java Governor election, Ganjar Pranowo was partnered with Taj Yasin Maimoen, while Sudirman Said was paired with Ida Fauziyah.

Based on the results of an interview with KH. Dr. Moh. Afif, the caretaker of the Al-Hanafiyah Jekulo Kudus Islamic Boarding School, December 27, 2022, the situation in Central Java during the 2018 - 2020 presidential and gubernatorial elections was positive, and it occurred that the potential gubernatorial candidates were able to choose partners who aligned with the community's aspirations and beliefs, resulting in a welcoming atmosphere. According to Dr. Nor Hadi, SE., MSi, Akt – student living in Semarang, the competitive atmosphere of the election for governor of DKI Jakarta has little influence on the election of regional heads (governors) in Central Java. Ganjar Pranowo from PDI-P, who will lead Central Java for the second time, is quite acceptable to the public. Dr. Atabik, the Caretaker of the Ash-Sholatiyyah Islamic Boarding School in Rembang, believes that Ganjar is partnered with Taj Yasin, who is a descendant of the influential Kyai, KH. Maimoen Zubair. Ganjar Pranowo is the representative of a conservative-ideological group that originated from secular nationalist groups. On the other hand, Taj Yasin represents a cultural moderate group that emerged from religious nationalist movements, with a strong support base in the North Coast of Central Java. Meanwhile, Sudirman Said represents conservative-ideological and culturally moderate hopes.

Alfat Fajar Ramadhan – A student at the Al-Mashhad Manbaul Falah Wali Sampang Pekalongan Islamic Boarding School, has the argument that the North Coast of Central Java is characterized by a paternalistic environment, where the people show a humble and obedient mentality, following the guidance of the Kyai, who serve as role models for the community. Kyai in the North Coast of Central Java has conservative religious characteristics, including integrating Islamic teachings with local community customs. There is an anecdote about the very respected Kyai, KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi Kudus, when regent candidates visited him, requested prayers for their success in the election. In response, he prayed for all the candidates collectively, without singling out any one individual. He said, "*tak dongakke kabeh, sopo sing dikersakke Gusti Allah dadi, pasti dadi* (I pray for everybody, whomever God chooses will undoubtedly become)."

The response from KH. Sya'roni Ahmadi reflects the common viewpoint of a Kyai who adheres to conservative ideology. Most of Kyai in the North Coast area, where there are prominent Pesantren, have conservative ideologies and align themselves with political parties supporting government initiatives. Researchers' observations when they were friends with HM. Arwani Thomafi - young politician, son of KH. Thoyfur, who is also a PPP politician, shows that as an Al-Anwar student under the care of Mbah Moen, he was very polite in socializing the party's religious-based programs to the community. Observation results from direct involvement during 2018 – 2022 with HM. Arwani Thomafi. The overall conclusion is reinforced by the direction of the Pesantren al-Anwar, located in Sarang District, Rembang Regency, under the leadership of KH. Maimun Zubair (Mbah Moen). He is focused on national politics and is associated with the United Development Party (PPP, *Partai Persatuan Pembangunan*). The students were not influenced by Mbah Moen's charisma, thoughtful attitude, and extensive knowledge, nor were they influenced by his astute approach to political matters in their support for the PPP.

Interviews with Anis Permana and M. Dhosifan Faiz provide a clear picture of how the religious attitudes of the people on the North coast of Central Java are greatly influenced by conservative and ideology-oriented Kyai. In the context of the election, their attitudes show the depth of devotion to the teachings of the Kyai and the principles of the religion they adhere to. Something similar was explained by the two students, they chose to remain in the pesantren and not get involved in political campaign activities, as a form of steadfastness to the teachings they believe in. Through this decision, the Al-Masyhad Manbaul Falah Wali Sampang Pekalongan pesantren, under the guidance of KH. Subki Mashhadi, continues to uphold the values of independence and strong faith, while also demonstrating a commitment not to get involved in practical politics. Hopefully the attitudes and principles conveyed by these students can inspire us to be wiser in facing the challenges of the times without ignoring the religious values that we hold.

KH. Drs. Em. Nadjib Hassan – Chairman of the Sunan Kudus Minaret and Tomb Foundation has a view that is not much different from several previous figures, that in Islamic boarding schools, many perspectives emerge when faced with the reality of the struggle for power between political parties and elites who use religious symbols and are involved in money politics. It is the obligation of every Muslim to use Islamic symbols in order to get a leader who is able to uphold the truth, uphold justice, and advance public welfare based on the principles of humanity. If there are many candidates and only one candidate is potentially able to uphold these values, then it is permissible to use religious and religious symbols and even money politics to win that one candidate.

In order to meet the aforementioned leadership requirements, it is essential to comply with established rules and regulations while using religious symbols, religion, and money politics. Religious standards are necessary to demonstrate prejudice towards certain communities, political parties, and politicians who have the ability to maintain the truth. Furthermore, suppose people finds themselves in a situation where they have to fight against candidates who may lack trustworthiness, display dishonesty, and fail to promote prosperity and justice. In that case, it becomes essential to use religious symbols as a means to conceal this unfavorable potential. Using religious symbols is ethically permissible and does not disrupt societal order, which may otherwise lead to adverse consequences for the country and state. It does not promote instability and conflict or create a threat to national unity.

Prof. Dr. H. Ade Dedi Indranaya, Professor of UIN Abdurrahman Wahid Pekalongan, said that in several widely circulated videos, Gus Baha' or better known as KH. Bahauddin Nur Salim has given meaningful sermons. In the sermon, Gus Baha' emphasized the importance of investing in electing leaders who have noble qualities, such as fairness, trustworthiness, honesty, and commitment to upholding the truth and advancing public welfare. This practice, according to him, is not just a recommendation, but an obligation for the people to prevent the election of leaders who have qualities and characters that are contrary to these principles.

Gus Baha' further explained that the condition of a nation will change for the better if every candidate for leader who advances has equally commendable qualities. Therefore, in electing a leader, we sincerely ask Allah SWT to be given His guidance, so that we can elect the right leader without being influenced by religious symbols or, more worryingly, money politics which often damages the integrity of the democratic process.

CONCLUSION

The position of the Santri community in the North Coast of Central Java regarding the capitalization of religious and religious symbols and the use of money politics can be divided into two distinct opinions:

The capitalization of religious and religious symbols in order to uphold the truth by selecting candidates who are deemed to be able to realize public benefit (maṣlaḥah 'āmmah) is permitted and even mandatory if there is one candidate who is thought to be elected but has the potential to cause harm to public life.

The capitalization of religious and religious symbols for the interests of party groups (maṣlaḥah juz'iyyat) and/or individuals is not permitted, especially if the interests of the party group and/or individuals are contrary to the general benefit (maṣlaḥah 'āmmah) which was formulated by the founders of this nation.

The Santri from the North Coast of Central Java will only take action if they have obtained the Kyai's approval. The idea that one group of society can claim a greater religiosity based on the increased use of religious symbols is unjustified as the identity of conservative-religious groups has merged with moderate-cultural groups. In addition, the widespread use of religious symbols by candidates in presidential and regional head elections further distorts the line between the two groups.

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